

First the story as it appeared in the Tay Valley Family History Society Journal followed by Ann Forrester's transcription of John's own notes.

# KLONDYKE John



## Doug Soutar finds gold in old notes



*Klondyke John*

My grandmother's cousin, **John Forrester**, thereafter known as **Klondyke John**, was appointed by Klondyke Government Concession, Limited to travel from UK to Klondyke and set up the company machinery. The pay was £20 per month plus board and lodging but half pay on the way out and back. It is not clear if the journey he describes in the extracts from his notes, reproduced below, merited full pay or half pay!

### The voyage through the labyrinth of islands was picturesque

'My journey as far as Skagway at the head of the Lyn Canal was prosaic enough except for the magnificent scenery. The voyage north across Queen Charlotte Sound past Prince of Wales Island and through the labyrinth of islands that lie between the Pacific and the mainland is a most picturesque one.



Skagway, when I reached it, was a collection of tents, log cabins and wooden huts. There were only two decent hotels, or rather sleeping houses, in the whole place. You pay for your bunk, get your meals wherever you can. I have been in some of the most wicked cities on earth, including Chicago and Seattle, but neither of these, I am sure could ever hold a candle to Skagway at the time I arrived. The rascally **Soapy Smith's** gang ran it. Smith even controlled the bank, in which I deposited several dollars and which I was never allowed to retrieve. A vigilance committee eventually rounded up the gang and deported them to face justice, killing Soapy in so doing.

The ice was beginning to break up in the Yukon and we had 1000 miles to go. I had secured an excellent horse, and as I

did not wish to overburden the poor brute, I decided to leave a good deal of my baggage.

We were continually up to the waist in snow

For the first eleven miles up the Skagway valley the road was passable but in two places at least, the horse and rider were up to the waist in slush and snow. After an hour's rest and a feed for man and horse we started up the Canyon, which was most unpleasant work. We could make little headway and were continually up to the waist in soft snow, and at several places my poor horse had to be dug out.

The trail here was most treacherous, as underlying the snow there would be a crust of rotten ice beneath which there was an undercurrent of water and on one occasion I was completely drenched up to the neck, and the poor horse stuck so completely it took three hours to get him



*Top – Base camp for Soapy. Jeff Smith's parlour, or Soapy's Saloon, Skagway, which at that time was gaining a reputation as a hell on earth.  
Above – Mrs Klondyke John. Agnes Maclean Cochrane.*

to move at all. After many struggles, we got to the head of the gorge where there was a stopping place. It was getting so dark by the time we got here, it would have been madness to attempt the trail any further. I never felt so done up in all my life.

### On our way we met fellows dying by the trail side

For the next two days we went

without food at all, and had to pitch our tent on the most desolate forsaken piece of land one could imagine. Between hunger, cold and want of sleep I lay down beside my horse a helpless lump of clay till I was rudely awakened in the morning by a few other travellers coming down in the opposite direction.

Fortunately, they had a little food, bacon and beans, and we all partook of the breakfast together. I was also able to purchase fodder for my pack horse and we were able to proceed.

At Log Cabin, it was impossible for a horse to go further but at this point we were able to hire a dog team and sled and were able to make some progress.

On our way, we met one or two fellows dying by the trail side. I was able to spare an

hour with one, a young fellow whom we learned had come from Missouri. Whether he lived or died I was never able to ascertain. This was only one of the many whom we had to pass on the way and leave to the hands of providence.

There were very few road houses and shelters in these days and great caution was needed to guard against being caught in a storm which arise so suddenly and boisterous in these parts. Transport of supplies was practically impossible when snow was not on the ground and we had to buy fish from the Indians who were squatted here and there along the trail. I don't think I had a good substantial meal for two months.

**It was said that 3,000 horses and 1,000 dogs lost their lives by starvation and brutality**

We pitched our tent at the head of Lake Bennett where we had to wait a week before the ice broke up to enable us to proceed on our journey over the waterway to Klondyke. The trail was strewn with dead horses and dogs. It was said that 3,000 horses and 1,000 dogs had lost their lives by starvation and brutality. We took advantage of the first opening in the ice and started down the lake in a canoe. Paddling was exceedingly difficult against such a strong current but after three hours hard pulling against rotten ice, we managed to return again to Bennett! Here we had to wait impatiently for another three days till the best part of the rotten ice had drifted past. Lake Bennett is over 30 miles long and not more than half a mile wide and is banked on either side by huge masses of black rocks. Lake Naves and Lake Tagish were the next lakes we crossed after leaving Lake Bennett. Our journey through

them was pleasant enough except for the floating ice, which was a continual obstacle. After leaving Lake Tagish, we entered Five Mile River which joins Lake Tagish with Lake Marsh. Here the mosquitoes were swarming in millions and I seemed to be exceedingly good prey. After a comparatively easy journey to the head of Lake Tagish we pitched our tent. Here we met many Indians who crowded about us as if we had dropped from the moon.

We had now come over 100 miles from Lake Bennett when we arrived at Miles Canyon. This is one of the most dangerous canyons of the whole route. Hundreds of speculators with scows and all their earthly belongings have been hurled into eternity at this narrow gorge; rather than take the risks of going through here, we took the tramway which in construction is the most primitive tramway in the world. There is not a single piece of iron in it.

**No-one can realise what going into Klondyke really means**

Beyond Miles, White Horse rapids is about  $2\frac{3}{4}$  miles long and the total fall is about 50 feet. The left shore just below these rapids was strewn with scows and outfits, which had been wrecked and it is reckoned that

32 lost their lives in 1898 alone. Many little graves were dotted here and there with a piece of wood as a headstone. No-one can realise what going into Klondyke really means unless they have been actually through it. To begin with, one required at least £400. In fact many a one spent all their hard-earned savings, mortgaged their homes and borrowed money to get there.

Those who witnessed it can alone appreciate the pathos and the misery that marked that wild stampede of human beings in 1898.



Left - Skagway, 80 years later

Right - The Five Finger Rapids

After crossing Lake Laberge we imagined our difficulties at an end, but this was not so. Not only does the current run with great velocity, the channel makes so many short sharp turns that navigation is very risky. By this time we had abandoned our canoe and engaged a passage on a flat bottomed scow propelled by steam. Luckily my former experience as a marine engineer came in here most timely, as our engineer fell a victim to typhoid fever, and was unconscious for over a week.

A final major obstacle before sailing 200 miles down the Yukon to Dawson City was Five Finger Rapids. These are five masses of rock stretching across the Yukon River. There is barely room for a vessel to get between and if one does not get exactly into the centre of the rapids about a mile above these rocks he is sure to be sent into eternity in less than two minutes.

**Of professional and educated men the number was surprisingly large**

There was scarcely a man in Klondyke at that time whose company any one might have been proud of in the best society circles. Of professional and educated men the number was surprisingly large. On our claim we had 3 ministers, 5 farmers, 2 sailors, 1 banker, 2 lawyers, 1 journalist, 1 dentist. Our destination was Hunker Creek 30 miles north of Dawson and the making

of the trail there proved to be the hardest work I had ever experienced. The first thing one had to learn was how to use an axe. One tree may be good sport to cut but when you have to cut down anywhere from 10 to 20 miles of them by 6 broad, it has a different aspect. When we did at last reach Hunker Creek, we found the ground everywhere covered with thick spongy moss which is much more tiring than dry sand to walk over.

These were only a few of the discomforts men had to endure. Hundreds gave up the struggle and started for home. Thousands spent the summer in idleness and dissipation in Dawson. Hundreds were enfeebled by bad food and improper cooking, others, worn out by anxiety and disappointment, sank into a state of

hopeless despondency.

The temperature of the winter of 1898 to 1899 recorded as low as 70° below zero but the average would be about 45° below zero and although it is so cold still it is bearable, being so very dry. One feels it most on the exposed parts, such as the ears, nose, cheek bones and fingers, but if these are carefully watched there is little danger of freezing. Of course in winter everyone wears clothing to suit the climate, fur cap and mitts (gloves are of no use), felt instead of leather boots, or moccasins the same as the native Indians wear.

A parkee or parka of light fur instead of a linen shirt. I may say from that time, after being so long accustomed to nice soft flannel and fur clothing, I never wore a linen shirt when I had on a stiff collar and stiff hat, without feeling rather uncomfortable and almost unbearable and wishing I had never come back to civilization again.

**In the gold fields themselves you find log cabins squatted everywhere**

In the gold fields themselves, you find log cabins squatted everywhere and at every conceivable angle; there is no order, no system; everything is a suggestion of the squatter, free and easy; you cast your eyes over the creeks and you find scores of men working away with the most primitive devices for mining.

Two men at a windlass or winch hoisting up rude gravel from the bowels of the earth and depositing it into a dump, something like what one would see about a pit in this country that was being newly sunk.



*One man – Alaskan prospector*

Digging is all done in the dead of winter. People have been surprised at this but there are many reasons why work has to be done then. It is safer underground as the frost keeps the earth together and prevents many accidents which would otherwise happen by the roofs falling in.

Further, there is not a particle of water in winter, everything freezes solid. Even the cooking has to be made from ice, and as it requires a great deal of water to wash up the gravel before you can see the gold, the earth requires to be dug and ready so that it can be washed up when the rivers and ice break up in summer.

**Everyone carries a little sack of dust**

All the hard work in the winter is therefore a preparation for all the hard work in the summer. The clean up is a time of great excitement. In one case where six men had been shovelling for 8 hours the total taken out of their sluice boxes amounted to £2,000. The current money is gold dust. Everyone carries a little sack of dust. The banks also receive gold dust for which you are handed a deposit receipt, equivalent in dollars to the amount of dust weighted out. Gold dust is the currency, when you require boots, clothing, etc., you simply pour out the required amount of gold dust into the scales and your boots are handed to you in return.

Now let me finish by describing Dawson - a haphazard collection of log cabins, frame buildings, and tents; there is not a stone or brick building in the whole city and from a sanitary point of view it is the worst in the world. The population would be about 10,000 and it said much for the N W mounted police that law and order was maintained.'



*And his dog*

Winchester House  
Old Broad Street  
LONDON. 27th April, 1899

To  
Mr. John Forrester

Dear Sir:

This is to confirm the terms of engagement with this company to proceed at once, via New York and Skagway, to the company's property at Klondike, and report yourself to the Manager, Mr. Robert Anderson at Skagway.

(1) That you are to faithfully discharge your duties in connection with the machinery, subject to the instructions and directions of the manager of the company, and be sober.

(2) You are to be paid a salary of £20 per month, and to be found in board and lodging.

(3) The company is to pay your passage out and home.

(4) You are to receive half pay whilst on your way out and home.

BY ORDER of the Board,

Klondyke Government Concession, Limited.

Jas. Stewart

Secretary.

*I Hereby agree to the above engagement.*

(Signed) John Forrester.

*“Those who went to the Klondyke in 1899 had certainly plenty of experiences to harden their muscles and their nerves and stir their feelings. A good many of us will not easily forget what we had to undergo. I shall endeavour to take you with me and hope my few years of experience in that wonderful country may be of interest to you.*

*My journey as far as Squaguay (sic) at the head of the Lyn Canal was prosaic enough except for the magnificent scenery. The Rocky Mountains covered with snow, with their gleaming glaciers and thundering avalanches, the wonders of the gorges and canyons of the Fraser River will not be easily forgotten, but it seems to me that no amount of writing or speaking can do justice to those grand isolated pieces of God's handwork. The view from the steamer on the way up to Skaguay is one of the most wonderful in the world, innumerable richly wooded islands with their broken outlines – the deer seen running along their shores or swimming across the river - all excitement to get out the way of the steamer - the blue sea dancing and sparkling in the mellow sunlight, the green shore of the mainland with Mount Baker clad in perpetual snow towering the distance a dazzling and glorious vision, and to the west, the Olympic range stretching away far as the eye can see. Even in winter the air is soft and balmy and the whole place delightful. The voyage north across Queen Charlotte Sound past Prince of Wales Island and through the Labyrinth of islands that lie between the Pacific and the mainland is a most picturesque one. Nearly all the slopes of both islands are densely wooded almost to the water's edge and in the distance are several great glaciers. I am sure there can be no sea journey of over 1000 miles where the landscape is as interesting, or at times more impressive in its rugged beauty and awful grandeur.*

*Skaguay when I reached it was a collection of tents, log cabins and wooden huts. There were only two decent hotels or rather sleeping houses, in the whole place. You pay for your bunk, get your meals wherever you can. I have been in some of the most wicked cities on earth, including Chicago and Seattle, but neither of these, I am sure could ever hold a candle to Skaguay at the time I arrived – of course, it had not then been taken over by the states police and was practically run by a set of rascals of whom Soapy Smith was the head. Drunkenness, vice, gambling, robbing, cheating and crimes of violence were frequent, and it was the only place in all my travels where I was compelled to carry a revolver. Human life was cheap as dirt, much cheaper even than drink. The whole district was terrorised by the desperate gang to which I have just referred, and familiarly known as*

*the Soapy Smith Gang. The town of Skaguay was legally staked and granted to a most respectable man named William Moore, but legal tenure by another was no obstacle to Soapy Smith. He and his gang relocated the land, formed among themselves a town council, sold building plots and evicted all tenants or squatters who resisted their authority, - in fact the entire authority of the place was in the hands of this deplorable gang and 'might was right'. The members of this gang were composed of the chief magistrate, police, lawyers, bankers, saloon keepers etc. Luckily I was warned that such a gang was on the look out for strangers, so I had my baggage lodged with the customs officials until I felt my way about. I had no sooner stepped ashore than several paid officials of this gang were anxious to know if they could conduct me to a boarding house. Had I gone with them no doubt, I would have been robbed of all the money and goods I had, but I had made up my mind to paddle my own canoe, and paddle it I did. There were whisperings among themselves to the effect that was no good, however I did not get off altogether scot free. I deposited several dollars in the bank for safety, thinking that they at least must be honest, but to my intense horror I learned two days afterwards, that the bank agent was also one of the Soapy gang - I went back to the bank again, and produced my deposit - the bank agent of course could not recognise his own writing and although I threatened them with legal proceedings, it was to no avail **I have not yet neither got my money nor the deposit.** Of the many amusing stories of this remarkable gang, the one about the minister is too good to be omitted. A minister had been working with a great deal of zeal and success raising money for a church. One of the first persons he visited was Soapy who at once headed the subscription list for £100. This encouraged the minister very much, and he pursued his canvassing with renewed energy. About a week later he met Soapy again who asked him how he was getting on. Oh, splendidly, said the minister, if I could just get a few hundred dollars more, I would be able to get contractors started right away on my church. Soapy handed him another hundred dollars and told him to come up to his office. When he had got most of the money he required, they would let him have the balance. The poor unsuspecting minister never imagined that he was being shadowed all the time by a member of Soapy's gang, and when at last he came again to Soapy's office thinking the crowning day of his efforts had arrived, it was only to look into the muzzle of Soapy's revolver with the stern demand - "The money" which, needless to say was quietly handed over to the ruffian.*

*This incident so aroused the respectable part of the Community that a vigilance committee was formed and this sort of ruffianism was soon brought to bay. The gang were all rudely wakened out of their respective beds early in the morning at the point of guns. They were then ordered to march to the wharf where the vigilance Committee had a vessel chartered ready to convey them in their pyjamas back to the states. One of them, however escaped into the brush and got into Dawson unrecognised. Soapy undaunted raised his revolver to shoot Mr. Frank Reid the convener of the Committee. Reid was a splendid shot however and shooting back at Soapy killed him on the spot. Unfortunately, Mr. Reid died of his wounds a few days afterwards, but this ended once and for all the ruffianism, which will stand to the everlasting disgrace of the states laws. Soapy's body lies no one knows where away back in the brush but Mr. Reid's grave every year is the scene of a large crowd of spectators and in the town of Skaguay the Americanism of the death of Mr. Reid is recognised by a general suspense of all business.*

*My experiences of this town were most varied, but we must pass on. As the ice was beginning to break up the Yoken (sic), we had still 1000 miles to go. I had secured an excellent horse, and as I did not wish to overburden the poor brute, I decided to leave a good deal of my baggage and take no more than was absolutely necessary for the long and tedious journey to Dawson. For the first eleven miles up the Skaguay valley the road was passable, but even then much worse than the corduroy roads back in Canada. Two places at least, the horse and rider were up to the waist in slush and snow. After an hour's rest and a feed for man and horse we started up the Canyon. The scenery of the place I shall never forget - it was magnificent, wild and rugged beyond description. The black precipitous rocks rose to a height of 2,000 feet on both sides of the gorge which was filled to a depth of thirty feet with snow and water. I had been warned not to go out so soon, but as I had such a*

quantity of machinery coming on, I had to find out the quickest and best way to get it in. The toil up the Canyon was most unpleasant work. We could make little headway and were continually up to the waist in soft snow, and at several places my poor horse had to be dug out. The trail here was most treacherous, as underlying the snow there would be a crust of rotten ice beneath which there was an under current of water and on one occasion I was completely drenched up to the neck, and the poor horse stuck so completely it took three hours to get him out and he was so badly chilled, it took us another hour hard rubbing to get him to move at all. After many struggles, we got to the head of the gorge where there was a stopping place. It was getting so dark by the time we got here, it would have been madness to attempt the trail any further. I never felt so done up in all my life. Between hunger, wet, cold and aching bones, I hope never to experience the same again. After a dinner or supper of bacon and beans washed down with a little hot water, I took off my soaking wet clothes and tumbled almost unconsciously into my bunk. But despite the fatigue of the day sleep was impossible. I was too tired to sleep and I must confess at the time I thought of seriously turning back, but when the daybreak came my spirits rose – my clothes were dry and after another feed of bacon and beans I made up mind to go through to the bitter end. I bought a good pair of rubber hip boots from a man going out and proceeded to the summit, passing the customs into British territory. How my heart did warm to that Union Jack – when a Britisher has not seen anything British for months and suddenly some familiar incident crosses his view, he feels as if he had friends there and was nearer home. I had a long chat with several Canadian mounted Policemen at the summit and found them most gentlemanly fellows, willing and anxious to help and guide you as best they could, - quite a contrast to our experience in Skaguay.

We thought our troubles all over when we got to the summit but we really had only commenced. For the next two days we went without food at all, and had to pitch our tent on the most desolate forsaken piece of land one could imagine. Between hunger, cold and want of sleep I lay down beside my horse a helpless lump of clay till I was rudely awakened in the morning by a few other travellers coming down in the opposite direction. Fortunately, they had a little food, bacon and beans, and we all partook of the breakfast together. I was also able to purchase fodder for my pack horse and after rubbing our eyes and shaking ourselves, we were able to proceed to the log cabin. We were also joined by two others, which made travelling a little more pleasant. We were advised to wait here for two weeks till the trail was in better condition, but I said no, I would either go on or die in the attempt. At first I took all these troubles and new experiences with a little grumbling and discontent, but latterly I got quite reckless and took everything in good humour. But our difficulties seemed to get worse the further we went, men and horses were dying with cold and starvation and we had to destroy two horses to put them out of misery. My own horse was abandoned at Log Cabin. – It was impossible for a horse to go further.

We got our packs on our backs and trudged along to the next road house almost unconsciously. At this point we were able to hire a dog team and sled and were able to make progress to Log Cabin. On our way here, we met one or two fellows dying by the trail side. I was able to spare an hour with one, a young fellow whom we learned had come from Missouri. Whether he lived or died I was never able to ascertain. This was only one of the many whom we had to pass on the way and leave to the hands of providence. Our dog team started off in good form. These favourite little dogs are the pride of all prospectors and are cared for as one of the family. They are very affectionate and when well trained are more valuable in these regions than a horse. The leading dog knows the shout – mush on – gee – haw (?) and are more obedient to orders than a horse. Four dogs can usually pull one man on a sled and his baggage, about 100 lbs, and can travel 30 to 50 miles a day. However we had not gone far till we found the trail in several places covered with running water, varying to a depth of 4 feet. Before going through these dangerous places the bottom had to be sounded to see if the ice was strong enough. Usually the dogs swam across and I was able to carry the sled on my shoulder and again hitch on the other side. Late in the evening we arrived at Log Cabin – as usual soaking wet, cold and hungry, and my eyes began to trouble me very much. Snow, snow everywhere and the hot rays of the sun often caused snow blindness. Luckily, I had a pair of goggles, otherwise I am sure I

should have been blind. When we landed in Log Cabin, it was a lovely evening. The snow clad mountains, their summits aflame with the light of the setting sun, the long shadows, the glowing sky, made one of the loveliest pictures I have ever seen. The remainder of the journey to Lake Bennett was pretty easy. The snow water was beginning to disappear from the trail, and it was marvellous how one managed to get over fallen trees, steep rocks, through streams, marches and quagmires. At one steep step place one of our party slipped off the trail and was hurled right down a steep bank of snow and jagged rocks, however, a few minutes brought sled and man both again none the worse. There were very few road houses and shelters in these days and great caution was needed to guard against being caught in a storm which arise so suddenly and boisterous in these parts. Transport of supplies was practically impossible when snow was not on the ground and we had to buy fish from the Indians who were squatted here and there along the trail. I don't think I had a good substantial meal for two months. Since I went in, a splendid railroad has been made so that to-day Klondyke is a pleasure trip, and if I could afford it I should certainly take that trip again. The scene in the canyon of the White Pass is one of the grandest that can be conceived with its large high walls, foaming leaping and tumbling in its awful hurry to get to the sea, throwing up great large sprays into the air which glitter in the sunshine like pieces of broken glass, the rugged huge masses of black stones and the hollows which seem to be bottomless, all these fill the mind with astonishment and awe. The only thing to gladden one's heart is the sunlight and the clear blue sky, but when the sun hides his face you have feeling of awful loneliness. We pitched our tent at the head of Lake Bennett where we had to wait a week before the ice broke up to enable us to proceed our journey over the waterway to Klondyke. The winds were exceedingly moist and cold here, and my first evening was spent in one of the most miserable road houses, I have ever seen in my life. The house was anything but air tight. You could see the stars anywhere from your bunk and the wood planks of the partition in my room were so shrunk you could almost shake hands with the people in the next room. The room was lit by a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle. The bed was a bunk of a few boards nailed on to the wall. You had to find your own fire, water, food, blankets etc. and for this you had to pay the modest sum of \$5 or £1. They say that men going to the Klondyke lose all respect and decency. It is not to be wondered at. There is no red-tapism or etiquette of any kind recognised in that part of the Globe. Anyone who wishes to study human nature stripped of all disguises has ample opportunity afforded him by the people of the Klondyke. Life-long friends who had set out together quarrelled and sometimes became the most bitter enemies. But man's inhumanity to man in the mad rush to get gold was nothing compared to the cruelty to dumb animals. The trail was strewn with dead horses and dogs. It was said that 3,000 horses and 1,000 dogs had lost their lives by starvation and brutality. The savage ferocity with which horses and dogs were treated made one's blood boil. I got so mad over one fellow kicking his dogs because they were unable to pull a load fit for a horse that I interfered at the risk of my life. However, after a few pugilistic exercises we managed to lighten their burden and make life more tolerable. It is not always advisable to interfere however, unless one is fully armed. Anxious to get away from Bennett which was becoming the scene of too many brawls, we took advantage of the first opening in the ice and started down the lake in a canoe. We kept as near the shore as we possibly could, but sometimes we were obliged to take the middle of the channel. We had one French Canadian pilot with us who got quite impulsive and nervous, especially when we were being carried with the current in the face of dangerous floating ice. It certainly required a man of great tact and experience and a cool head in paddling to get round those cadys (sic) as we did. We were most unfortunate however, in taking a wrong stream in the river and were rushed into a quantity of rotten ice and were gradually drifting into one of the most dangerous currents of the river. There was no help for it but to reach the shore as quickly as we could but this proved to be worse than we anticipated. The current was much stronger than we had suspected and we approached - - - - - (line missing) the Canadian of losing courage. We suddenly realised that if the ice caught us, we were sure to be crushed to atoms between the ice; instinctively I demanded the oars and for once in my life I experienced the extraordinary strength and endurance a man receives when face-to-face with death. Paddling was exceedingly difficult against such a strong

current but after three hours hard pulling we managed to return again to Bennett where we had patiently to wait for another three days till the best part of the rotten ice had drifted. Lake Bennett is over 30 miles long and not more than half a mile wide and is banked on either side by huge masses of black rocks. A narrow channel called Caribou connects Lake Naves with Lake Tagish which was the next lake we crossed after leaving Lake Bennett. This lake is about 17-20 miles long and about 1 mile wide and our journey through this was pleasant enough except for the floating ice which was a continual obstacle. After leaving Lake Tagish, we entered Five Mile River which joins Lake Tagish with Lake Marsh. Here the mosquitoes were swarming in millions and I seemed to be exceedingly good prey especially on my hands and neck which were almost proud flesh between oaring and the sun. The following day we took the precaution of providing ourselves with mosquito nets which proved effective so far as my neck and ears were concerned. After a comparatively easy journey to the head of Lake Tagish we pitched our tent. Here we met many Indians who crowded about us as if we had dropped from the moon. Physically they are very unlike the Red Indians we had met previously in the States, some were most sulky and loved great pugilistic tendencies. Being very much in the minority we had to quickly swallow any seeming insult and take everything good humouredly. Several murders were committed by the Indians on spectators [?speculators] here, but by the time we arrived they were rather awed at seeing several of their number being carried away for execution, and otherwise we fear our lives would have been of short duration.

We had now come over 100 miles from Lake Bennett when we arrived at Miles Canyon. This is one of the most dangerous canyons of the whole route. Hundreds of Spectators [?speculators] with scows and all their earthly belongings have been hurled into eternity at this narrow gorge; rather than take the risks of going through here, we took the tramway which in construction is the most primitive tramway in the world. Rails are of wood. Wheels are of wood. In fact, there is not a single rail or piece of iron in the whole of that tram line. If necessity is the mother of invention it is particularly so in this case. Miles Canyon is only half a mile long, and about a hundred feet wide, but the terrific rush of the water and the huge perpendicular walls on either side I shall never forget. If I had never got to Dawson, I should certainly never have attempted this death trap. I threw a large trunk of a tree into the centre of the river above the canyon and in less than 3 minutes it was entirely out of sight, carried down by the tremendous torrent against which nothing could ever stand. The Sioux rapids a little beyond this is also very perilous, and its speed is something like 20 miles an hour. The distance from the head of the Canyon to the foot of the White Horse rapids is about 2 ¼ miles long and the total fall is about 50 feet. The left shore just below these rapids was strewn with scows and outfits which had been wrecked and it is reckoned that 32 lost their lives in 1898 alone. Many little graves were dotted here and there with a piece of wood as a headstone, with the name of the deceased, but this was difficult sometimes to obtain. On one, I remember was written in pencil "Here lies a young man about 25, height 5-10, fair complexion, wrecked here on way to Dawson." Many similar inscriptions were written where it was [im]possible to get the name. Here we met dozens of big strong able bodied men returning, giving it up for a bad job, quite disconsolate and heart broken, finding the trail too hard, and the journey too tedious. No one can realise what going into Klondyke really means unless they have been actually through it. To begin with, one required at least £400. In fact many a one spent all their hard earned savings, mortgaged their homes and borrowed money to get there. Each outfit represented a considerable sum and one had every opportunity of studying character in all its aspects. I was greatly struck with some of the men who were going in or going home. One fellow in particular, a Canadian who was almost a physical wreck had a most resolute determination to get there; others again, big able bodied men lying on the trail crying their eyes out undecided whether to go in or return. Those who witnessed it can alone appreciate the pathos and the misery that marked that wild stampede of human beings in 1898. There were always plenty of kindly offers of assistance and the large hearted benevolence which was generally practised to fellow men in distress would suit many a church member or professing Christian to shame, and no where have I seen such genuine practical Christianity not even in my mother country. From the White Horse Rapids to Lake Laberge is 25 miles and the length of the lake is 32.

*Here especially the distances are most deceptive; objects away ahead of us were to appearance quite near, although it took hours to reach them. This is accounted for by the particularly clear sky and change in latitude.*

*After crossing Lake Laberge we imagined our difficulties at an end, but this was not so. Not only does the current run with great velocity, the channel makes so many short sharp turns that navigation is very risky. By this time we had abandoned our canoe and engaged a passage on a flat bottomed scow propelled by steam. Luckily my former experience as a marine engineer came in here most timely, as our engineer who was formerly in charge fell a victim to typhoid fever, and was unconscious for over a week. The banks here were strewn with wrecks and accidents were of almost daily occurrence. But I do not wish to tire you with details of misfortune, suffice it to say that any one who imagines he has a large heart and strong will, let him try a visit to Klondyke as it was then and I have not the slightest doubt he will boast less by the time he has finished. I cannot take you to Dawson, however, without describing the Five Finger Rapids. These are five masses of rock stretching across the Hootalinqua or rather the Yukon River and is divided by channels of varying width. They are very serious obstacles in the way. There is barely room for a vessel to get between and if one does not get exactly into the centre of the rapids about a mile above these rocks he is sure to be sent into eternity in less than two minutes. As it is, provided the craft get safely through you are immersed in water when it makes the leap through the Fingers.*

*After sailing down the Yukon [an]other 200 miles you arrive at Dawson City. Now let me describe this place as it was in 1898. First, it strikes one as a haphazard collection of log cabins, frame buildings, and tents; there is not a stone or brick building in the whole city and from a sanitary point of view it is the worst in the world. The land is low and marshy and the town is shut in by high hills to the back. The town at that time was half a mile square approximately; there would be roughly a population of 10,000 and considering the difficulties of housing which daily confronted the authorities, it said much for the N W mounted police that such law and order was maintained - and I say it with all due respect to our Edinburgh police - that life and prosperity was much safer there than it is here. It was too costly to get. And there was also too much hard work connected with a trip to Klondyke to make it attractive for the average rascal who is usually averse to manual labour and hard work. There was scarcely a man in Klondyke at that time whose company any one might have been proud of in the best society circles. Of professional and educated men the number was surprisingly large. On our claim we had 3 ministers, 5 farmers, 2 sailors, 1 banker, 2 lawyers, 1 journalist, 1 dentist, and quite a number of spectators [?speculators] and prospectors who make it their life business to travel, all working as ordinary miners and living, sleeping, and eating together.*

*Some of the happiest evenings ever I spent were after a hard day's work was done and all gathered round a large roaring wood stove enjoying a pipe of tobacco and a chat. Every question was discussed and everyone seemed in the very best of good humour. Now and again some one would strike up a song and we would all join in with the chorus. In winter there is no sunshine and only 5 hours daylight. However I must not leave you in Dawson city. This is not where the mining is done but only the general meeting place where the law is administered and where business is transacted, goods bought, gold dust banked, and claims recorded. Our destination was Hunker Creek 30 miles north of Dawson and the making of the trail there proved to be the hardest work I had ever experienced. The first thing one had to learn was how to use an axe. If anyone thinks it easy to log down trees let him try it. One tree may be good sport but when you have to cut down anywhere from 10 to 20 miles of them by 6 broad, it has a different aspect. The main thing to watch is to fell them so that they will fall out of the way of the trail and this can only be done by experience. Then again we had bridges to build, marches to bottom, and rocks to cut. For a long time we lived in our tent and as the nights grew colder we put on more wood on the stove till one evening the funnel of the stove got so red hot it set the tent ablaze and it was with difficulty we escaped partially clothed. That night's cold I shall never forget, as we had to run almost naked to the nearest roadhouse which was fully two miles away. Next day we set to building a log cabin and had it finished in 4 days. After which we were secure for the*

coming winter. Our log cabin was 12' x 9' inside but cabins in Dawson vary in size. The one our men lived in was as large as this hall and one I know is as large as if not larger than this church.

When we did at last reach Hunker Creek, we found the ground everywhere covered with thick spongy moss which is much more tiring than dry sand to walk over. After deciding where to sink our prospect holes, we arranged the machinery accordingly, and in a very short time, work was commenced in right earnest. The mosquitoes however, hindered us very much and became almost intolerable especially at night when one expects to get a little sleep. A smudge or smoke fire is about the only thing to keep them away. These were only a few of the discomforts men had to endure. Hundreds gave up the struggle and started for home. Thousands spent the summer in idleness and dissipation in Dawson. Hundreds were enfeebled by bad food and improper cooking, others, worn out by anxiety and disappointment, sank into state of hopeless despondency and in 1898 the administrative Council of Dawson had to spend £20,000 to relieve the sick. The number of deaths from typhoid fever, dysentery, scurvy and other diseases was appalling. I took typhoid fever myself and was treated in a private hospital. The doctor's fee cost me 2,000 dollars or over £100. Doctors charge £40 a visit.

The temperature of the winter of 1898 to 1899 recorded as low as 70 degrees below zero but the average would be about 45o below zero and although it is so cold still it is bearable, being so very dry. One feels it most on the exposed parts, such as the ears, nose, cheek bones and fingers, but if these are carefully watched there is little danger of freezing. Of course in winter everyone wears clothing to suit the climate, fur cap and mits (gloves are of no use), felt instead of leather boots or moccasins the same as the native Indians wear. A parkee or parka of light fur instead of a linen shirt. I may say from that time, after being so long accustomed to nice soft flannel and fur clothing, I never wore a linen shirt when I had on a stiff collar and stiff hat, without feeling rather uncomfortable and almost unbearable and wishing I had never come back to civilization again.

One learns a great deal by experience. Two of us made up one day to go down to Dawson City and the cold that day was intense. We were warned not to go as we would be sure to be frozen, but the advice was given in vain and off we went. Scarcely had we gone more than 5 miles when my friend's nose showed signs of freezing. Immediately I took off my mits to rub it with snow and in doing so, my three of my fingers were badly frozen, my toes also were frozen and I feel the effects of these frost bites to this day. My ears have been frozen several times just by stupidly not pulling down my fur cap far enough.

The winter usually begins about the end of September and ends in April. The autumn and spring are delightful with plenty of warm sunshine during the day and nice bracing frost in the evening. The days are also bright and the sky blue, and these compensate for the short dark days in winter. In May and June there is scarcely any dark and one can read at midnight. On one occasion I saw the sun dip and rise again. The sunshine is white and glaring and although the heat is not remarkable, the rays are scorching; if you get your ears and face frozen in winter, you get them blistered in summer. Winter in the arctic on the whole is most enjoyable and I could quite willingly spend all my winters there, if it were possible to get back to civilization every spring. The winter there makes different impressions upon different minds. To me the dominant characteristic was its silence and majestic grandeur; away from the beaten lines of the trail, there is not a sound to be heard. On the trail one hears at a very great distance the clanging of the sleigh bells or the 'mush on' of their driver, and when one is on a lonely march it is surprising the effect a meeting of dog teams have. You never pass anyone on the trail without some acknowledgement if not an inspection of each others noses, and it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish men from women as nothing can be seen except the eyes when riding in a sleigh. I made many visits to Dawson City from our head quarters at Hunker. On one occasion I got badly frozen in several places and that same day we met a lady who had succumbed to the cold and was lying quite unconscious. When one falls asleep outside with extreme cold and fatigue, it very often proves fatal unless some one happens to catch them before they are too badlyfrozen. It was with great difficulty we managed to get this lady on to her feet again – for which she felt most grateful.

*The trees have all a strange appearance - the branches grow down. The explanation of this is perhaps because of the long winter the weight of the snow on the branches and only about 5 months sun in summer which is scarcely sufficient to lift them heavenward, consequently they are like weeping willows.*

*Few who have spent a winter in the frozen north can escape feeling the awful immensity of the place with its silence and solitude and one cannot but feel how small and insignificant one is in the hands of such a great architect, but amidst all the depressing loneliness of such a vast country we have always the consolation of knowing that God is everywhere even there out of the world; but nowhere have I seen anything composed to equal the glory of a sunset or sunrise in the Klondyke and I believe it is even more in spring further north. Night and morning the sky is aflame with colour and far away the Rocky Mountains in their majestic grandeur clad in perpetual snow offer a picture which is nowhere to be seen even in Switzerland. From reports of gentlemen who have been in both, I understand the Alps could be hid in several valleys of the Rocky Mountains.*

*Let us depart from the scenery and describe the gold fields themselves. You find log cabins squatted everywhere and at every conceivable angle; there is no order, no system; everything is a suggestion of the squatter, free and easy; you cast your eyes over the creeks and you find scores of men working away with the most primitive devices for mining. Two men at a windlass or winch hoisting up rude gravel from the bowels of the earth and depositing it into a dump, something like what one would see about a pit in this country that was being newly sunk. Digging is all done in the dead of winter. People have been surprised at this but there are many reasons why work has to be done then. It is safer underground as the frost keeps the earth together and prevents many accidents which would otherwise happen by the roofs falling in. Further, there is not a particle of water in winter, every thing freezes solid. Even the cooking has to be made from ice, and as it requires a great deal of water to wash up the gravel before you can see the gold, the earth requires to be dug and ready so that it can be washed up when the rivers and ice break up in summer. All the hard work in the winter is therefore a preparation for all the hard work in the summer. When I say hard I mean hard. It is comparatively easy mining in this country to mining in Klondyke. You must remember that everything is frozen solid and the very earth is frozen hard right to bed rock some 90 feet deep and as the gold nuggets usually lie on bed rock, the shaft or prospect holds have to be dry to the very bottom. Gold does not lie as some people imagine just anywhere to be picked up. Of course, the peculiar conditions of Klondyke were most deceiving even to the most expert mining engineers and very often the tenderfoot and not the wourdow (sic) {sourdow} was the luckiest. There is not a more speculative business I can think of than placer gold mining. The considerable amount of intelligent prospect work done, has shown that gold does not exist in paying quantities where most expected. But it would be rash to assert that good placer claims will not be found in other parts of these large areas. Alexander McDonald a man I know very intimately has already taken out over £3,000,000 and many other I know have amassed large fortunes from claims that were least suspected to be of any value. A labourer who gave me a hand to erect the machinery is now worth approximately between £60,000 and £100,000 and I have since visited his home in Seattle where he belonged to some of the finest blocks in the city. The total output for the year 1897-8 may safely be estimated at £5,000,000. The mother lode of the placer deposits is still to be found and lucky is the man who finds that. He will undoubtedly be the richest man the world ever produced. Hydraulic mining has not been a success because of the peculiar conditions of the Klondyke. There is very little quartz gold found in the country. The nearest quantity mines being at Juneau; they are considered the richest mines of their kind in existence, yielding as much as 22 dollars per ton of gravel. Many people think Klondyke has been worked out - Not so. I feel confident that there is more gold in the hidden creeks of that vast country than has ever been taken out. The trouble is to find it. What the Klondyke wants like many another good country is Capital. Individual effort is slow. In many of the creeks there is gold in every foot of the ground but it requires some improved and economical methods of working it. In fact even where the ground has been worked out there is as much gold left on the bed rock and in the talings as would pay syndicates to undertake operations. With the exception of our claims*

where we employed machinery, there is nothing more primitive than the methods usually adopted – a pick shovel, pan, a few carpenter's tools, were all the appliances they had. Mercury is rarely used in the district as the gold is so heavy of itself it separates from the gravel almost immediately it is put into the sluice boxes. Generally, it has to be freed from the black sand which is almost as heavy as the gold but this can be done easily with a large magnet. Panning out is the sole guide of the miner.

When shafts have been sunk to the desired depth connecting tunnels are made – this is for ventilation and safety. The earth is all wound up to the surface by means of a rope windlass and buckets. It is then deposited in a large dump, and allowed to remain all winter till the sun breaks out in the summer. The strong summer thaws everything again and in a few weeks we have the rivers running again and water sufficient to wash up all this earth in which the gold is contained.

The clean up is a time of great excitement. In one case where six men had been shovelling for 8 hours the total taken out of their sluice boxes amounted to £2,000. In another at which I assisted the gold taken out was £6,000 and included one nugget worth £60. A few sights of this kind makes one feel they have only to go and dig but experience is a great enchanter. Next, to witnessing a large clean up on Dominion creek, one par yielded £50. On Eldorado one shovel of dirt a produced fully £1000. The current money is gold dust. Everyone carries a little sack of dust. When you require boots, clothing etc., you simply pour out the required amount of gold dust into the scales and your boots are handed to you in return. The banks also receive gold dust for which you are handed a deposit receipt, equivalent in dollars to the amount of dust weighted out.

We are well off in this country getting letters 3 and 4 times daily. In Klondyke the mail only comes in after the rivers break up after a period of 6 or 8 months waiting. When a mail steamer arrives there is a regular stampede to Dawson City to get your letters. There are no postmen. You call at the post office and wait your turn, falling into a single file as they do here at the theatres, but wait there is much longer and so many carry stools or some primitive device to sit on till it comes their turn.”

“This looks like a mis-spelling of "sourdough" or "sourdow" , which is/was fairly commonly used as the generic name for an old-timer , both in Yukon and Alaska. [ See <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sourdough> ] I think it originally came from their staple diet, where they baked bannocks or dampers as the roughage of every meal, keeping a little dough back each time to provide the yeast to be mixed into the next day's dough, and "proved" overnight. In the context of JF's account, it makes perfect sense, viz " very often the tenderfoot and not the wourdow was the luckiest "Geoff Hinchliffe”